

## SAFETY BELT USE: TRAFFIC SAFETY TIPS

Safety belts are your best protection in a crash. They are designed so that the forces in a crash are absorbed by the strongest areas of your body--the bones of your hips, shoulders, and chest. They keep you in place so that your head, face, and chest are less likely to strike the steering wheel, windshield, dashboard, or the vehicle's interior frame, and they prevent you and other occupants from being thrown into each other or ejected from the vehicle.

When you buckle up, be sure to adjust your belt correctly. Do not wear the belt **across your stomach** because the likelihood of serious

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U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration

injury increases dramatically. Do not place the shoulder belt **behind your back**, as it cannot restrain your upper body when it is in this position. Your head and chest could strike the steering wheel, the dashboard or the back of the front seat.

Do not wear the belt **under your arm**, since this causes the belt to ride over the lower part of your rib cage. You could break ribs and sustain serious internal injuries.

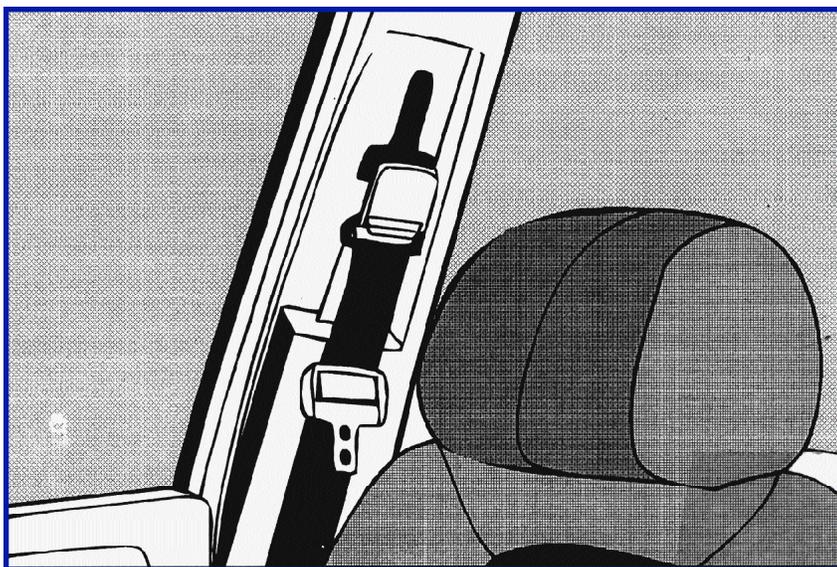
### The Correct Way to Wear a Safety Belt

Small adjustments in either the belt position or in your position on the seat can improve your comfort and make the belt work better in a crash.

There is a correct way to wear a safety belt.

**The lap belt** or lap portion of the lap/shoulder belt combination should be adjusted so it is low across the hips and pelvis, and never across the stomach. Adjust the lap belt so it is snug.

**The shoulder belt** should cross the chest and collarbone and be snug. The belt should never cross the front of the neck or face. Do not add excessive slack (more than one inch) into the shoulder belt. In some vehicles, the shoulder belt



▲ Figure 1. A shoulder belt adjuster.  
Courtesy: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

# ABOUT SAFETY BELT USE

comes across your chest automatically, but the lap belt must be buckled manually. *If your vehicle has a manual lap belt, it must be buckled for maximum protection.* Use the complete system the manufacturer installed in your vehicle and follow the instructions provided in the owner's manual.

Some vehicles have **shoulder belt adjusters** that allow you to move the shoulder belt upper anchorage. (See Figure 1.) This feature makes it easier to adjust the shoulder belt so that it does not touch the neck.

## Vehicles with Air Bags

If your vehicle has an **air bag**, you will notice that it also has a safety belt system. Air bags provide **supplemental** protection. They are effective primarily in protecting occupants involved in frontal collisions, but offer little or no protection in a side, rear, or rollover crash. *For maximum safety, lap and shoulder belts should always be used in air bag-equipped vehicles.*

## The Right Way to Sit

**The way you sit** when you ride in a vehicle is important. Your safety belts cannot work properly if you have the seat back in a reclined position or if you are slouched in

your seat. The shoulder belt will not be against your chest and the lap belt could ride up over your stomach.

For best protection, have the seat back upright and sit back in the seat. Adjust your safety belts for a snug fit. (Figure 2 illustrates the correct way to wear a safety belt.)

## Restraint Systems and Children

Lap and shoulder belts do not provide adequate protection for

*Never use a rear-facing infant safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle equipped with an air bag on the passenger side.*

Be sure to check the owner's manual about the correct way to install child safety seats in your vehicle.

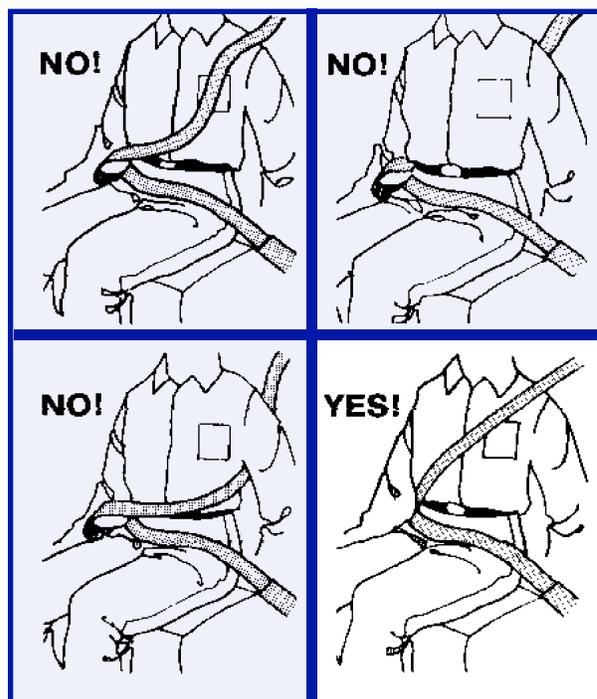
## Safety Belts and Pregnancy

Pregnant women should not be afraid to use safety belts. The main risk to the baby is injury or death of its mother, and motor vehicle crashes are a leading killer of women in their child-bearing years. Injuries and death to the baby are closely related to the extent of injury sustained by its mother. Since mothers who wear safety belts sustain fewer injuries than those who do not, risk to the unborn baby is reduced.

## Buckle Up in the Back Seat

As of December 11, 1989, all passenger cars (except convertibles) manufactured for sale in the United States must come equipped with shoulder and lap belts in the window seating positions of the back seat. This rule was extended to require shoulder and lap belts in the window positions of the rear seat of convertibles, vans, light trucks, and multipurpose vehicles manufactured after September 1, 1991.

Most vehicles manufactured before 1989 do not have combination lap and shoulder belts. **Retrofit kits** may be available for



▲ Figure 2. Buckle up for a snug fit.

infants and small children. They need the special protection of a child safety seat designed for their body size. **The best place for a child safety seat is in the back seat.**

consumers who want them. To find out if a retrofit kit is available for your model vehicle, contact your dealer.

**Lap Belts:** If your vehicle only has a lap belt in the back seat, wear it. Lap belts are proven safety devices. The belt will keep you in your seat and inside the vehicle during a crash. Remember

to wear the belt low and tight on your hips and not over your stomach.

**State Belt Laws:** Most states have laws requiring safety belt use, and all states require child passengers to be in a safety seat. These laws have been extremely effective in increasing usage of belts and child safety seats and are responsible

for saving thousands of lives each year. By obeying these laws, you take advantage of the best available protection in the event of a crash. ■

## JUST THE FACTS CHILD SAFETY SEATS

### ***Do children really need to be buckled up around town and on short trips?***

Yes. Believe it or not, it's the short trips at low speeds that lead to the greatest number of crashes. About 75 percent of all crashes occur within 25 miles of home. In addition, about 40 percent of all fatal crashes occur on roads where the posted speed limit is 45 miles per hour or less. Low speed crashes or even a panic stop can cause serious injuries.

### ***Isn't it safer for me to hold my child in my arms than use a safety seat?***

No. For a child traveling in a motor vehicle, the most dangerous place to be held is in an adult's arms. This is often called the "child crusher position." In a crash of approximately 30 miles per hour, a ten pound infant will be ripped from a belted

adult's arms with a force of almost 200 pounds. If the adult is not wearing a safety restraint, the child is likely to be crushed between the adult's body and the windshield, dashboard or back of the front seat.

### ***Won't my passenger-side air bag protect my child even better than a car seat?***

No. The best place for a child safety seat is in the back seat. Never use a rear-facing infant safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle equipped with an air bag on the passenger side. Remember, too, that children who are standing, kneeling, sitting on the edge of the passenger seat, or even sitting correctly in the seat (but unrestrained) in vehicles equipped with a passenger side air bag could be at risk of injury from an inflating air bag. Consult your owner's manual about the correct way to install child safety seats in your vehicle.

### ***My child has "special needs," so conventional child safety seats don't work.***

There are child seats on the market that are designed especially for children with special needs, such as prematurity, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, respiratory problems, various types of casting and other positioning challenges. The National Easter Seal Society developed a program, "Kids Are Riding Safe/Special Kids Are Riding Safe (KARS/Special KARS), through a grant from NHTSA. It provides hospitals with educational materials, curriculum and structure to ensure that every infant or young child is riding safely. For more information about the KARS/Special KARS program, contact the National Easter Seal Society at 312/726-6200.

# IF YOU THINK YOUR MOTOR VEHICLE HAS A SAFETY PROBLEM, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

## AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE (800) 424-9393

If you think that your vehicle has a safety problem, you can assist the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) by completing and mailing back the Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ) included with this fact sheet, or calling the Auto Safety Hotline.

The toll-free Hotline number, (800) 424-9393, can be reached from anywhere in the United States. If you are calling from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the number is (202) 366-0123. A Spanish-speaking operator is available weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern time. The Hotline is available to the hearing impaired through a teleprinter (TTY) number, (800) 424-9153. In the Washington, D.C. area the TTY number is (202) 366-7800.

If it is determined that a safety defect exists, the manufacturer

has to fix the problem at no cost to the owner.

If there are any documents relevant to your case, including copies of repair bills and letters to the manufacturer, attach them to your completed VOQ.

If you are not sure of any information requested in the VOQ, leave the box blank. But we must have the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) to process your questionnaire. The VIN is a 17-digit number that can be seen through the front windshield on the driver's side of the dash-

board. When reporting a tire problem, the DOT identification (located on the sidewall) is needed.

The VOQ asks if you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of your report to the manufacturer. If so, check YES on the VOQ and sign and date it. When we send the report to the manufacturer, it often results in a satisfactory solution of individual problems. But NHTSA cannot *order* corrective action unless the vehicle or item of equipment is determined to have a defect and a safety recall campaign is conducted.

Check out our home page for information on a variety of vehicle safety topics.  
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>





